



**Subject: RE: [Patrin] 138/01/n Prague/London - airport case - application launched at E**

**Date:** Mon, 29 Oct 2001 11:04:55 +0100

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**References:** 1

> Liberty takes Home Secretary to court over treatment of Romas

> UK Immigration actions at Prague Airport:

>"discriminating,humiliatingandunlawful"

> Wednesday 24th October 2001

>>

> Liberty has this afternoon served papers on the Home Secretary,

> as we launch our application for judicial review on behalf of the

> European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) and six anonymous Czech

> Roma people.

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> The Roma people were subjected to discriminatory, humiliating and

>unlawful treatment by UK Immigration Service Officers at Prague

> Airport in July of this year. The officers were there as part of a

>special arrangement with the Czech Government allowing British

>immigration officials to turn back passengers before they even

>reached the plane to travel to Britain.

>>

>Liberty's in-house counsel Shami Chakrabarti, the lawyer for this

>case, says:

> "People at Prague airport were being kept off the plane purely by

>reference to the colour of their skin. It's a mechanism to turn

>people away automatically, without having even to listen to the

>~~story of people who are highly likely to have a valid right to~~

>asylum.

>>

> "We believe this is a racist practice, which doesn't reflect the

>Government's justifications for the Immigration exemptions from the

>Race Relations Amendment Act".

>>

> The people automatically turned away are not from groups who are

>unlikely to be fleeing persecution - rather, they are among those

>more likely to have a legitimate reason to request asylum. That's

>because an authorisation signed by Home Office Minister Barbara  
>Roche specifies seven ethnic or national groups whom immigration  
>officers are empowered to refuse entry to the UK outright on the  
>basis of their race or nationality.

>These include:

>>

>\* Afghans - although Britain is now at war with the Taliban regime  
>and has denounced its extensive abuses committed against  
>Afghan people;

>\* Kurds (despite Iraq), Tamils (despite the ongoing civil war in Sri  
>Lanka), Somalis (despite over a decade of complete lawlessness  
>and state breakdown - the Foreign office lists it as one of just eight  
>countries in the world to which it advises against all travel);

>\*

>\* ... and Roma. In a letter to the Guardian this summer, the  
>highly-respected Medical Foundation for Care of the Victims of  
>Torture stated that it had treated 59 Czech Roma in the last five  
>years alone at its centre for survivors of torture and violence. The  
>Foundation noted

>"numerous testimonies of official complicity, that at best describe  
>indifference by the authorities to these attacks and at worst  
>highlight their participation in anti-Roma violence, including the rape  
>of Roma women. This evidence seems to count for little with the  
>Home Office".

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## >BACKGROUND

>Our six clients in this case all went to Prague Airport to catch  
>flights to London in the course of July.

>>

>\* All had valid airline tickets.

>\* All are Czech nationals - and so don't need a visa for travel to  
>the UK

>\* Yet all were singled out for extended questioning apparently by  
>reference to the colour of their skin. They were prevented from  
>travelling to the UK. The procedure was conducted in full view of  
>attendant media and other passengers.

>\* Some but not all were seeking asylum; one elderly woman was  
>seeking a short visit with her grand-daughter in the UK.

>>

> The Immigration Service may have been relying on a "ministerial  
> authorisation" signed in April 2001 by Home Office minister  
> Barbara Roche under the Race Relations Amendment Act 2001.  
> This document appears to allow people to be refused entry to the  
> UK by reason of their race.

>>

> The above-mentioned practice is contrary to general principles of  
> English law and to the Human Rights Act.

>>

> We shall be seeking an end to this degrading practice at Prague  
> Airport and the withdrawal of the ministerial authorisation.

>>

> Issued by Roger Bingham - press officer, Liberty; telephone 020  
> 7378 3656

>[www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk](http://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk)

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The Patrin Web Journal - [www.Patrin.com](http://www.Patrin.com)  
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